





Framing Early Childhood & Youth

Uniting For Early Childhood
Bismarck, ND
Aug. 5-6, 2008





Diane Benjamin & Jane Feinberg
FrameWorks Institute

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Uncovering the Public's Mind


- What did we learn?
- How did we learn it?



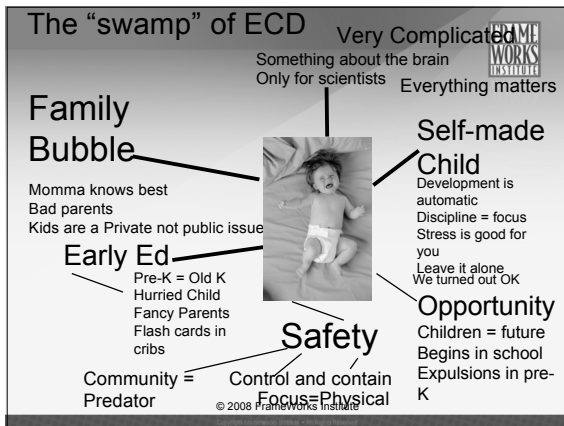
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Remember the Swamp?



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The Research Base

- a **meta-analysis** of more than 100 surveys and focus group reports of existing public opinion on parents and parenting, children, development, and related issues over the last 6 years
- **cognitive interviews**, or one-on-one interviews with a diverse group of 60 citizens in 6 states, parents and non-parents
- a series of 28 **focus groups** with engaged citizens in 13 states

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The Research Base

- 2 **focus groups** and 20 **cognitive interviews** with state legislators, staff and lobbyists in 4 states
- a **literature review** of frames currently in use by advocates and in news media
- **talk-back testing** with 400+ ordinary Americans to test simplifying models

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The Research Base U.S. Business Leaders

- 10 Leaders & 2000 Leaders
- CEOs, CFOs, Self Employed
- Minimum Income of \$125K

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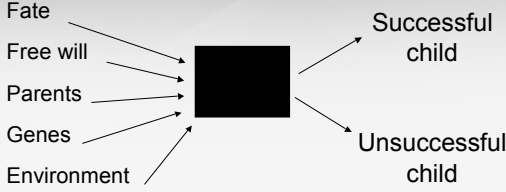
What did we learn?



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What the Public Sees: The Black Box



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When in Doubt, Default

Families are Responsible (aka “The Family Bubble”)

“I think one parent at least in the first five years until they get to school out to be at home because that sets the tone for the kids.” (Virginia man)

“I think they absorb. Through three and five -- I know my son absorbs just everything that came around him. (New Jersey woman)

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When in Doubt, Default


Families are Responsible (aka “The Family Bubble”)

“The parents are so protective now compared to what they were 20, 30, 40 years ago...I did a lot of things on my own. When we played sports, there was no parental involvement. We didn't have to be ferried, driven to a place where we played. We were independent... I think this holds back the development of children.” (Boston man)

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Parents PSA



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When in Doubt, Default

Safety is the Main Concern

"I guess you're looking for clean and safe facilities, and the right number of staff per children, and you're looking for activities that help the children grow intellectually rather than make sure they stand in line and be quiet." (Virginia woman)

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Keeping Kids Safe

A MATTER OF MINUTES IS ALL IT TAKES

Heatstroke,
brain damage,
abduction...
even death.
NEVER leave your
child ALONE
in a CAR.

www.ccrcla.org
For more information call CCRC at (818) 256-1000

Child Care Resource Center

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What Do the Dominant Frames Conceal?

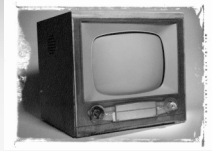
- Environments [housing, neighborhoods, schools, museums, libraries, community resources]
- Relationships [caregivers, neighbors, other children, other adults in addition to parents]
- Development [a concrete set of capacities - social, cognitive, emotional, and moral - promoted by some experiences and damaged by others]

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Where Do These Default Frames Come From?



- News media
- Experts' materials
- Advertising
- Political rhetoric, public discourse
- Tradition, "common knowledge"



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Media Frames of Children



Center for Communications and Community

- Crime and health stories predominate.
- In health stories, the dominant frame is child safety (seat belts)
- Only 13% of stories look at systemic factors
- Only 3% look at development
- Frame is "the imperiled child" or child as precious object

Content analysis of local news, 11,000 stories, July 2000, 3 affiliates in 6 cities © 2008 FrameWorks Institute

Veterans of Perceptions & Messaging



Advocates

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kids are very complex ▪ Everything counts ▪ Children are made for learning ▪ Infants become persons at a very early age ▪ The brain is not developed at birth ▪ Early intervention services are critical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Education is about individualized service ▪ Parenting is difficult ▪ Parents are teachers ▪ Parents are students ▪ Trained coaches are needed for parents ▪ All parents are good ▪ Parents are experts |
|---|--|

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Veterans of Perceptions & Messaging

Experts

Self Regulatory Development

"The ability to inhibit a response one is all set to perform, sometimes called effortful control, has been of special interest to researchers who seek to understand how individual differences in children's tendencies to respond to stressful or exciting events affect the growth of emotion regulation. Effortful control is one component of a larger set of inhibitory competencies, termed 'executive functions', discussed later..."

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What Reframes Have Been Attempted with What Consequences?

- Day Care
- School Readiness
- Prevention


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Day Care (It's a Container)

"It's a babysitting service is what it is. The kids are going there and that is where kids go when mom goes out and works her half a day or whatever and comes home and picks them up. They have the choice. They don't have to work."

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Day Care (It's a Container)

"I think that the people who are doing it really need to have a heart for kids and really love them....Just enjoy the children where they are at. I don't think they have to have a lot of things to manipulate and all that kind of stuff but just to feel comfortable with the person taking care of them."




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Day Care as Container

- Childcare center
- Children
- Leaving children at center
- Caring for children
- Childcare workers
- Container
- Packages
- Putting objects in container
- Handling objects
- Package handlers

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Day Care Is About Safety and Security

If childcare is package handling:

- Is it a highly skilled job?
- Do you need to hire highly skilled workers?
- Does it pay workers well?
- Does it need to pay well?
- Does the environment at the facility matter?
- Do the relationships between handlers affect the package?



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School Readiness Means Little to People



- Americans want children to succeed in school
- They recognize that there are factors that contribute to school success
- “school readiness” is not a clear, available and motivating concept which engages ordinary people.



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School Readiness Cues The Hurried Child



- “They seem to push kids into education a little too fast sometimes and they don't allow them to be kids and play. I mean people are getting their kids into pre-school at three years old... you see a lot of people that want to teach their kids like you said multiple languages before they are five and teach them to read before they get to kindergarten.” New Jersey man, Focus Group Informant


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School Readiness Cues The Hurried Child



“Are we trying to get them there too early? Eventually that child is going to be potty trained and ...that child is going to read and write, and are we trying to push a two year old to be ready to read and write?” Virginia woman, Focus Group Informant

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School Readiness PSA

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Prevention: What Comes to Mind?

- Drugs
- Gangs
- Disease
- Drinking and Driving, under age
- Fear
- Caution
- Sex Education
- Safety

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Language of Prevention Triggers Problematic Patterns of Thinking

In the Picture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Safety--drugs, alcohol, sex, etc. ▪ Parental role ▪ Lack of discipline ▪ Solution = Information 	Out of the Picture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning Disabilities, mental health, etc. ▪ Government Role ▪ Development ▪ Solutions = Policies
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Safety and fear are highlighted



The way prevention has been drilled into everyone's head at least in the past 10 years, 12 years that my kids have been alive, I keep thinking drug or alcohol prevention. (man)

When you have children it's the drugs, the alcohol, gangs, like she said. Trying to keep them away from the bad elements. (woman)



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The Problem with Prevention as a Frame



- People strongly favor the concept of prevention
- But the simple term "prevention" does not cue up those positive attitudes
- Instead, other more developed patterns of thinking get in the way
- Prevention requires a translation to realize its power as a public idea

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Prevention PSA



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When parents are the problem, government's role is dismissed.



- Inappropriate:
They've shifted the burden to the government to raise our children pretty much.
- Programs exist:
They have programs and programs and programs that come out in all sorts of prevention.
- Too costly:
It sounds great on paper but the state of Connecticut does not have this kind of money.

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It's About Working Parents



Findings from our research on low-wage work:
(test paragraph)

- The world has changed - about two-thirds of women are now in the workforce, but the workplace has not changed to adapt to families' needs. The workplace still assumes the ideal worker has no other responsibilities except work. You can be asked to work overtime or change your schedule with no thought about whether there is any impact on your home life. Seventy years ago we created a basic set of work-related benefits like unemployment insurance, social security, and the 40-hour workweek. We need to update these laws and make today's workplace work for all workers by providing living wages, affordable childcare, and flexibility in hours.

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Response?



- Connects with personal experience
- Brings women in the workplace conflict to the forefront
- Makes the discussion about personal choice, greed and family values
- Pushes government to the sidelines
- Reminding of government role helps

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Summary of what we know



- People have minimal access to a working model of child development.
- When considered at all, it is a closed private system.
- There are strong entrenched frames that get in the way of development: black box, family bubble, safety.
- The reframes currently in use are not yielding the desired result.

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Summary of what we need to do



- Give people a concrete understanding of development through a MODEL.
- Choose VALUES that attribute responsibility beyond the child and family.

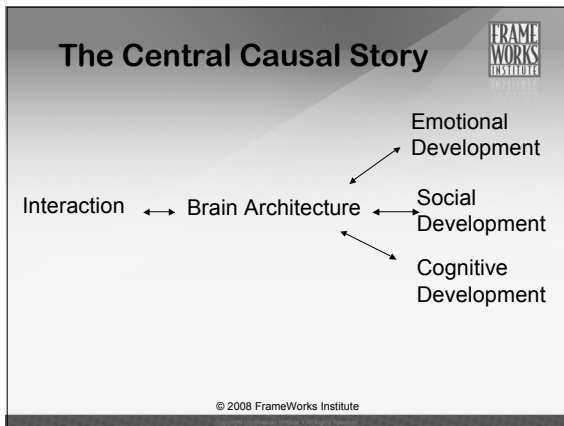
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Elements of the Frame



- **Values**
- Context
- Numbers
- Messengers
- Tone
- Visuals
- **Metaphors and Models**
- Stories

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Core Story of Development

- Brains are built over time.

A silhouette of a human head in profile, facing right. The interior of the head is filled with a pattern of circuitry or neural connections, symbolizing the development of the brain over time.

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Core Story of Development


- Brains are built over time.
- Nature + Nurture: Genes establish the basic architectural blueprint; relationships supply the conditions that guide how brain architecture gets built.

A photograph of a man in a dark shirt and light pants helping a young child on a bicycle. The child is wearing a white jersey with the number 17. They are outdoors on a paved path.

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Core Story of Development

- Brains are built over time.
- Nature + Nurture: Genes establish the basic architectural blueprint; relationships supply the conditions that guide how brain architecture gets built.
- Brain plasticity and the ability to change behavior decrease over time.



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Core Story of Development

- Cognitive, emotional, and social competence are inextricably intertwined.
- Getting it right early is less costly, to society and to individuals, than trying to fix it later.
- Child development is a foundation for community development and economic development; the building blocks of society.
- Toxic stress damages the developing brain.

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Brain Architecture: a Simplifying Model for Early Childhood Development

The early years of life matter because early experiences affect the architecture of the maturing brain. As it emerges, the quality of that architecture establishes either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows --- and getting things right the first time is easier than trying to fix them later.



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Nurturing, responsive, interactions build healthy brains and a strong foundation for future development.

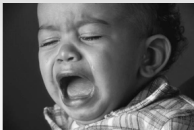


Central to the impact of relationships in the early years is their quality, particularly as it is expressed in the continuous back and forth interaction that takes place between an engaged child and an invested adult. When relationships are supportive, responsive, and predictable, they increase the odds of desirable outcomes. These positive experiences promote healthy brain development by contributing to the formation of responsive neural

circuits.

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When a young child experiences toxic stress, chemicals are released in the brain that damage its developing architecture.



When interpersonal experiences are disruptive, neglectful, abusive, unstable, or otherwise stressful, they increase the probability of poor outcomes. Toxic stress releases harmful chemicals in the brain that impair cell growth and make it harder for neurons to form healthy connections.

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Early Childhood Stress Influences Developmental Outcomes



Positive

Important to development & in the context of stable and supportive relationships

Tolerable

Potentially disruptive, but buffered by supportive relationships & safe environments

Toxic

Disrupts brain architecture, increases the risk of stress-related physical and mental illness

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Effects of the brain architecture model:



- It helps people see early child development as foundational - a term they repeated and saw vividly
- It establishes a sequence of development that makes prevention and intervention at discrete points more understandable
- It integrates social and emotional development into the definition of developmental success; so it's not just academics

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Effects of the brain architecture model:



- It overcomes narrow understandings of education as the sole goal and discipline as the core tool toward that end
- It foregrounds conditions, bringing more societal responsibility and extra-family actors into the developmental model.

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The Development Frame helps understanding of prevention policies



- It includes parents while expanding the definition of important relationships.
- It explains why relationships matter to development.
- They come to understand the importance of prevention, while continuing to support later interventions.

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The Development Frame helps understanding of prevention policies



- Social and emotional development begin to have the same priority as academic achievement.
- They begin to include developmental criteria in thinking about programs and policies.
- Government has an obvious role.

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Effects on Salience



"I think what really gets me ...is that it could actually have a chemical or biological or some sort of impact on the child's brain. ... Behavior is one thing, and attitude and personality is one thing, but if it can really negatively impact ... the chemistry and the makeup of the brain – you can damage that that early – that's really serious. That's more than just having a bad personality, that's really screwing up a kid."
Talk Back Informant

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Recommendations from the Research



- **Begin all communications by referring to values** such as stewardship, future, prosperity for society, or reciprocity (giving to children who give back to society later), all of which allow people to respond both morally and pragmatically
- **Define what is at stake** in terms of prosperity, a healthy and productive society, and workforce development

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Recommendations from the Research



- **Include the Brain Architecture simplifying model**, which helps people understand child development
- **Incorporate the idea of plasticity** so damage does not sound irreversible
- **Define the community's responsibility**, and explain the role for public policy.

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What do legislators say?



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What do legislators say?



What I think that research has done is it made people more aware of the importance of those [early] years. And I think most people were sort of kind of in the back of their mind knew those years were important. But this really says: "Yeah here's why, because this is what happens during that time."

I think that presenting it in that frame is more important than just saying "Healthy kids." Paying attention to the brain architecture is good because then they'll be good college students. I didn't know that until you sat down here. I mean I already know the concept of healthy kids, but. . . .

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What do legislators say?

I consider myself to be a very well educated person who thinks about these things and tries to keep up. But I was not aware there being scientific research that talked about the interactions between young people... and stress as having that much to do with brain architecture.

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What do business leaders say?




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What do business leaders say?

Part 1:

- 10 in-depth one-on-one interviews
- Early Council story was a “tough sell”

Part 2:


- 2,000 business leaders
- The Core Story is powerful

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Part 2: What do business leaders say?

- The Core Story works with business people
- The Developmental Story is more powerful than the economic argument
- The most powerful part of the Developmental Story is the intertwined nature of social, emotional and cognitive learning
- The Simplifying Models--Brain Architecture, Serve and Return, and Toxic Stress--all prove powerful
- The Simplifying Models have power across partisan lines.

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Putting it all together




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Putting It All Together...

- A sound investment in our society's future requires that all children have the opportunity to develop intellectually, socially and emotionally. **VALUE**
- But science tells us that many children's futures are undermined when stress damages the early brain architecture. That stress may result from family tensions over a lost job or death in the family. That stress makes babies' brains release a chemical that stunts cell growth. **SCIENCE/MODEL**
- When communities make family mental health services available so that early interventions can take place, they put in place a preventive system that catches children before they fall. **SOLUTION**

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Putting It All Together...



- Children are our future. They will inherit our institutions and steward our nation. We give to them now so that they can give back in the future. **VALUE**

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Putting It All Together...



- What science can now demonstrate is that the earliest stages of life require an environment of stable relationships that is the foundation for the brain's emotional architecture. Caregivers, teachers, neighbors, coaches, elders, everyone with whom the child comes in contact has a responsibility to nurture that child. They do that by stimulating the child's developing brain. This means interacting with the child, helping her learn to feel secure and to form trusting and durable friendships, and recognizing stress and disruption that might impair healthy development. **SCIENCE**

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Putting It All Together...



- Science shows that the training, knowledge and skills of consistent caregivers are critical to the solid foundation of brain architecture. But currently, the turnover rate among early caregivers is very high, due in large part to low pay. Science would suggest to policymakers that this early lack of investment will have long-term consequences on society's future. **SOLUTION**

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Research Findings on Public Perceptions of Youth

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The Adolescent Research Base

- National Research 1999-2001
 - Meta-analysis of recent survey research
 - Cognitive interviews with the public
 - Six focus groups in three cities
 - Catalog of framing options
 - Content analyses of TV entertainment and news, and print news
 - Media effects tests of dominant frames and popular practice
 - A national priming survey (4,500)
- Minnesota Example 2004
 - Eight focus groups
 - Cognitive interviews with the public

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Situation Analysis

- Believe youth today are different than they were in the past; have different values.
- Are not persuaded by factual rebuttals.
- Suspect parents are to blame.
- Focus on the subjective moral and intellectual growth, and have little concrete grasp of complete developmental process – brains, hormones, mental and emotional health, etc.
- Toggle between teens as the Other, and adolescence as a Process we all go through.

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The Pictures in our Heads: What First Comes to Mind?

What Default Frames Conceal

- The civic, academic, personal and career potential of youth are secondary to personal safety.
- Positive roles for community and government in assisting youth development are unexplained.
- Program quality and efficacy are discounted in favor of safety.

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How to Prime A Different Assessment of Today's Youth

Summary: Framing Youth Programs

Old Frame

- Teens as victims, bad kids
- Parents are responsible
- Outcome is autonomy
- Teens as “done”
- Development is learning, making choices
- Activities fill time, safety
- Responsible for my child

New Frame

- Adolescents as engaged
- Parents + community resp.
- Outcome is decent, solid adult
- Adolescents as developing
- Development is brain growth, capacity to make choices
- Activities assist development
- Responsible for our children

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Specific Recommendations

- Avoid using the word “teenager”: Use young people, youth or adolescents.
- Remind the public that adolescence is a developmental stage.
- Show youth involved in sports, volunteer and extra-curricular activities
- Connect adolescents to the broader community. Use coaches, volunteer leaders and seniors to attest to the importance of these experiences and the positive outcomes for young people and their communities.

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Specific Recommendations


- Show youth in situations in which their work and volunteer supports is altruistic and also helps to solve a social problem in the community.
- Explain the mutual benefits that come from positive youth development, i.e. we give to them now so that they can give back to our communities in the future.
- Avoid the “hero youth” story which exceptionalizes the example and casts suspicion on the less accomplished majority.

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